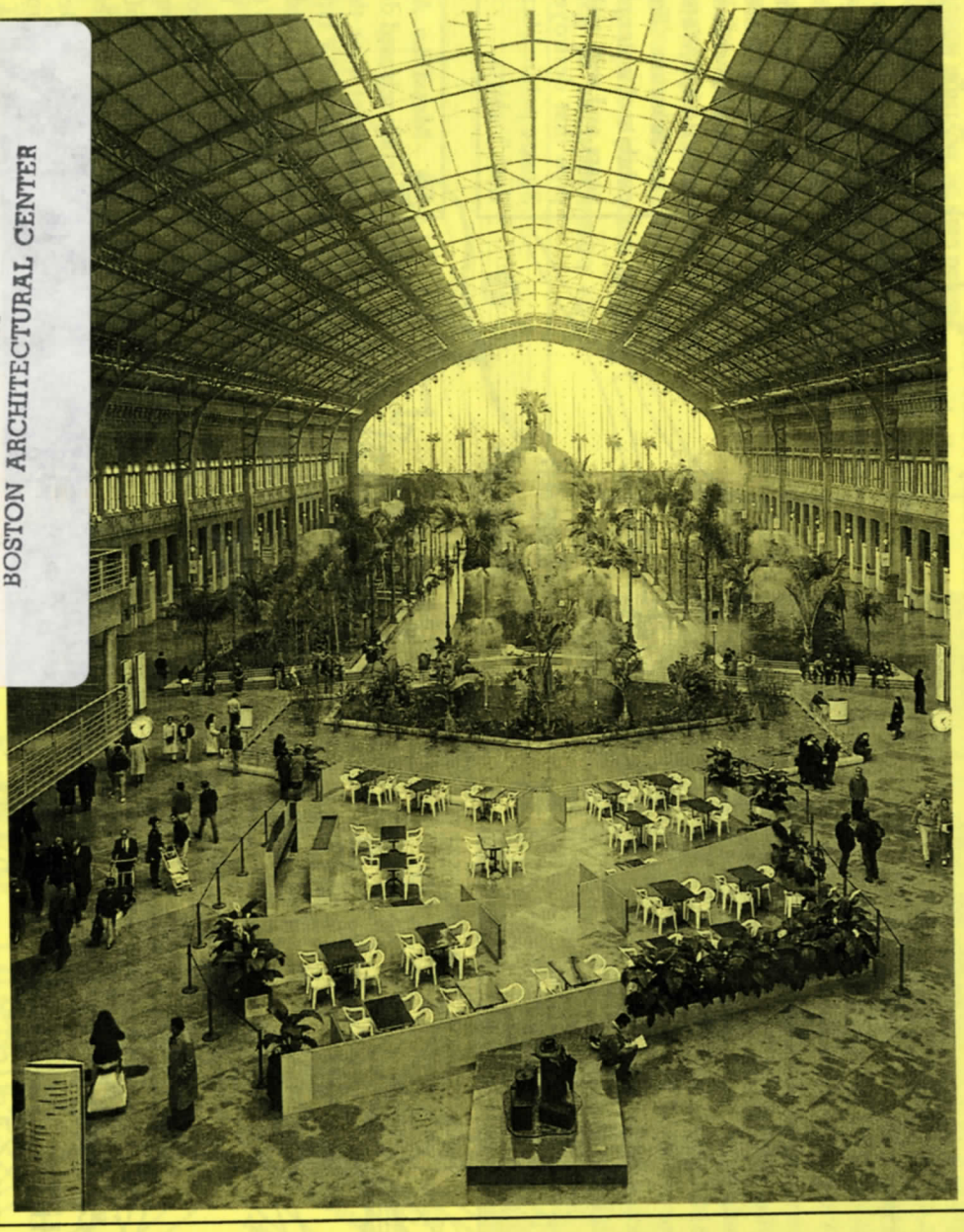
City Sleuth Citation
Annual awards on the landscape and cityscape

THE BOSTON INFORMER

No. 41 — The truly highbrow rag for people who can read — April 1, 1999

LIBRARY
BOSTON ARCHITECTURAL CENTER

New Proposal for Revitalizing City Hall Plaza



The latest proposal for City Hall Plaza—initiated by the Boston Redevelopment Authority, General Services Administration, Boston 600, Memphis 2000, and 7-11 stores—is to expand the much-heralded tent structure currently adorning the Plaza. The tent is left over from Christmas when it held the Enchanted Village exhibit. The tent has since been used to store hundreds of trash barrels removed from city streets because they were full.

The genesis of the expanded-tent design is the British Millennium Dome in Greenwich, England. Greenwich officials have agreed to send their Dome to Boston as soon as possible, an act that will please the people of Greenwich. United Rent-All has been selected to provide the additional tent structure needed to complete the effect, creatively dubbed "big tent over City Hall Plaza" by city officials.

Representatives from the Anti-Brick Coalition, the new name for the Trust for City Hall Plaza (renamed when people said they didn't trust them) said the tent structure provides an easy way to back off its insistence that a hotel is necessary to fund upkeep of the public open space. In addition to pleasing space for vendors to sell high-end Beanie Babies and other do-dads, the City will lease space at exorbitant rates to the Central Artery/Tunnel project for an "information center" and really rake in the money. Also, a casino below-grade in the old Scollay Square MBTA station is proposed with a 3 percent return to the City offered by Caesar's Place and Harrah's.

Questions remain about the on-again, off-again Congress Street pedestrian bridge. If the bridge is built, designers want to integrate it with the tent. Some have argued the overpass should be a cable-stay bridge; others have said it should be supported from the overhead tent structure to make that all-important connection to the public space. This all-important debate will rage for some time.

Support for the new tent-dome structure has been strong. Hilton's Tent City offered to donate a five-year's supply of seam sealer and Beacon Hill residents praising the plan, because it creates plenty of room for hot air from City Hall bureaucrats.

You saw it here in The Boston Informer: "Relief is coming to Boston" with public, self-cleaning street toilets. The Boston Informer has obtained a never-before-released photo of the prototype for the City's street toilet.

The City received three proposals to design and install the toilets, plus bus shelters, trash bins, and other assorted street furniture. The project will be paid for by the sale of advertising on the furniture and paper supplies.

An extensive public process provided design input. The public wanted a "less is more" design. The chosen design evokes an earlier age in juxtaposition with the high-tech era of the new millennium. Traditional materials will be used, including rocks from the Big Dig.

The use of natural materials has complicated plans for advertising on the toilets. The manufacturer is considering adding a changeable message sign at the roof's peak for the commercial messages.

They Said It!

"It's politics. That's the bottom line."
Mayor Thomas Menino on the Democratic National Committee's (DNC) decision to hold one of the biggest political events in Los Angeles instead of Boston.

"The fire test itself cost about $40 million, but most of that was paid for by the federal government, which encouraged engineers to do it."
Boston Globe reporter Thomas Plamer explaining why the Central Artery/Tunnel project spent $40 million on a test that might save $45 million.

"The MBTA will meet that deadline."
Brian Pedro, MBTA spokesman

"I wouldn't say I ran away from it; I chose not to address it.
Kelley Quinn, Boston Redevelopment Authority, on not mentioning the Big Dig during negotiations for the DNC convention.

"They are trying to bulldoze public opinion."
Senate President Thomas Birmingham on Massort's proposed advertising touting the benefits of the proposed new runway.

"If you widen the road, more traffic comes...the option of building your way out of the problem is a 1950s solution. It is not real."
Fred Salvucci, former Masschusetts secretary of transportation and construction, and prime mover of Central Artery/Project.

"We're focussed on the negative. We lost our will."
Kevin Sullivan, secretary of transportation and construction, on failure to build the Inner Belt highway in 1972.

"You write a check. If it also reinforces the project, it's easier to write."
Anthony Pangaro of Macomber Development and co-developer with Millennium Partners.

❶ The controversy over **Runway 14/32 at Logan Airport** has sent the pundits trying to spin the issue in several different directions. As they ask themselves if the issue is noise or if the issue is Logan Airport growth and the infrastructure needed to handle increased numbers of patrons, the RCN telecommunications network is out ahead of everyone.

RCN is setting up a center for teleconferencing at the new Logan Hilton whereby a virtual convention could be held at the East Boston Memorial Stadium (soon to be covered, using Central Artery/Tunnel mitigation money, of course) and eliminating the need for access to downtown, South Boston, or Back Bay!

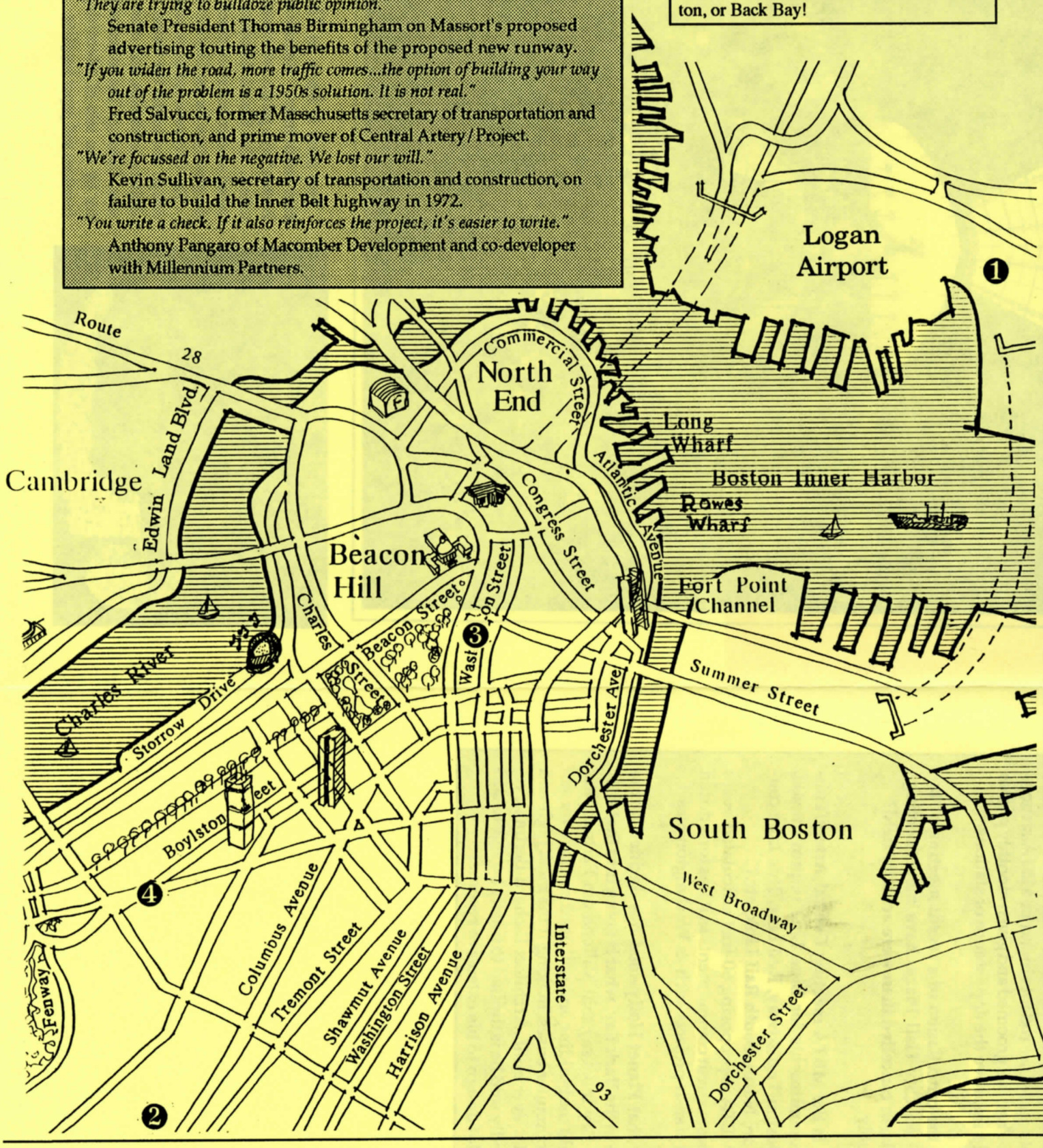
❷ Σεχρεταρψ οφ Τρανσπορτατιον ανδ Χονστρυχτιον **Mass Highway's Kevin Sullivan** εξπρεσσεδ δισμαψ τηατ τηε στατε, ιν τηε 1970σ, φαιλεδ το βυιλδ τηε **Inner Belt expressway** τηατ ωουλδ ηαωε ριππεδ τηρουγη Ροξβυρψ, τηε Φενωαψ ανδ Χαμβριδγε. Αλτηουγη ηε διδ νοτ με τιον **Barry Locke,** τηε φορμερ ηεαδ οφ τηε τρανσιτ αυτηοριτψ.

❸ **Lafayette Place,** which will soon be renamed Laughing in Place, announced the signing of leases for three of the four retail spaces being developed. City officials rejoiced at the news, saying that the development's new high-quality retail will help with the revitalization of lower Washington St.

The owners annnounced that a super-sized Dollar Store, a site office for the MBTA's Silver Line construction project, and a Boston Water and Sewer Commission museum. The museum will have exhibits of water pipes replaced in recent years and will sell pieces of the broken pipe that destroyed part of the Copley Square public library along with "Sewer Rat" T-shirts.

❹ **MassPike Air Rights Plan**—The recently released draft master plan for development over the MassPike identified subdistricts for types of along the three-mile stretch of roadway. The plan lays out a number of types of projects possible:

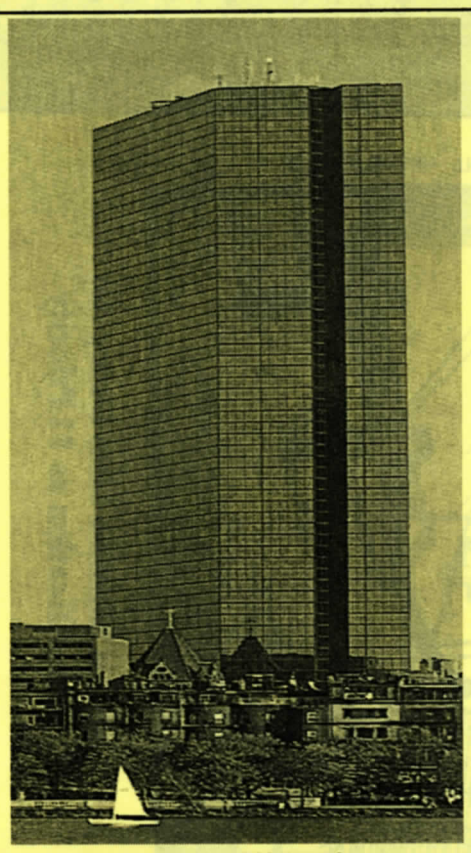
- **Neighborhood Bridge:** The cancelled Congress Street pedestrian bridge will be built over the Turnpike to help connect the South End and South Cove. A dragon motif will be incorporated.
- **Commercial Development:** A dog run or new airport is proposed for these districts.
- **Green Space:** A bridge over the Pike at Charlesgate would be outfitted with Astro-Turf and trees in planters that would be removed every six months to a facility in East Brookfield to recover from the exhaust fumes in this highway haven.
- **Neighborhood Improvement:** This district would feature air rights to allow expansion of Fenway Park, the Landsdowne Street nightclub district, four or five new parking garages, a new and triple-in-size Rat, six fast-food joints, and 400 freshman college dorm rooms...for Fenway/Kenmore neighborhood improvement!
- **Residential and Campus Space:** Boston University has proposed the Dr. John Silber Teaching School to teach the teachers who are teaching the teachers here.



Hotels multiplying at rapid pace—With construction of the new convention center just decades away, activity is heating up to maximize Boston's untapped hospitality market. The MBTA is toying with bringing back Pullman sleeper cars and running service 24 hours a day to capture some market share. Trend-setting Rebecca's on Charles Street will replace its restaurant with a 12-room inn, and not to be outdone, Au Jourd'hui and Ambrosia are planning for 16- and 22-room boutique inns at their restaurants.

"Gimmick" lodging has been proposed as a way to take peoples' minds off their bizarre accommodations. Suggestions have included floating casinos where people forget they don't have a bed; cots aboard the USS Constitution to experience history; and desks in college classrooms so guests can relive those "better than Sominex" lectures by Professor Rasmussen.

Prudential, John Hancock, and Millennium developments are seriously considering creating "convertible office space" that can double as hotel/hospitality space with specially designed cubicles, instantly transformable from one use to another.


Proposed Hotel Hancock

The commissioner of Public Works for Boston announced recently that a number of city trash bins were being permanently removed because they became too full with debris. Several neighborhood groups throughout the city praised the commissioner for this decisive and innovative approach to the problem. In keeping with this new take-charge attitude, three neighborhood groups submitted suggestions for similar action in places where unusual habits become the norm.

- install parking meters for the regular row of double-parked cars on Boylston Street
- remove trees to avoid problems with birds droppings
- seal catch basins and drains to stop rat infestation
- paint crosswalks across the entire street since pedestrians cross everywhere
- remove all traffic signals since motorists ignore them; activists say traffic will move better
- make Clarendon Plaza at Back Bay station a bus turnaround for the Route 39 bus
- create legal parking spaces in bus stops since everyone parks there already

The commissioner agreed to consider these suggestions, noting that these new policies could eliminate half-hearted enforcement and save lots of money.

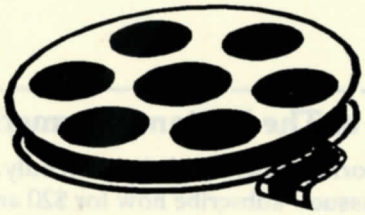
Mis-
THE BOSTON INFORMER
April 1, 1999

PRICELESS CLIP-AND-SAVE INSERT!

From the Archives, 1926: Activists from East Boston and Winthrop protest the inaugural flight at Boston's Logan Airport. Airport officials assured the activists that no addiional runways would ever be built.

Movies Not to Miss!

✔ **You've Got Mail**—the dramatic wake-up call to Massport Director Peter Blute after announcing plans to build Runway 14/32.



✔ **The Last Days**—horror story unfolds as old Central Artery is torn down leaving a bleak wasteland

✔ **Life is Beautiful (La Vita e Bello)**—Mayor Menino contemplates his third, fourth and fifth terms.

✔ **A Civil Action**—the saga of Congressman Joe Moakley scheming to get federal funds to resotre the Old Northern Avenue Bridge.

✔**Patch Adams**—the uplifting story of a man in the Boston Public Works Dept. who fearlessly attacks potholes.

✔**Enemy of the State**—the adventure of an intrepid accountant who penetrates the secret of how much the Central Artery/Tunnel project is really going to cost.

✔**Affliction**—a sensitive exploration of Massachusetts Convention Center Authority board chair Gloria Larson's feeling about Executive Director Francis X. Joyce.

✔**The King & I**—**Massport** Director Peter Blute narrates the struggles of one of his predecessors and himself to build Runway 14/32.

✔**Analyze This**—MassPike officials work with neighborhood residents to explain how Boylston Square air rights development will have minimal impact

✔**Simply Irresistible**—the lure of the South Boston Seaport District to developers and politicians

Headlines You'll Never Read...

- ✗ City Council president James Kelly proposes more luxury housing in place of South Boston Convention Center
- ✗ City proposes WASP memorial for vacant Hayward Place parcel near Lafayette Place
- ✗ Steve Kaiser takes job at Boston Transportation Department
- ✗ National Organization for Women honors MBTA
- ✗ Fleet BankBoston lowers bank service charges as result of post-merger efficiencies
- ✗ Boston bike cops teach safe cycling by example
- ✗ Jamaica Plain trolley jolleys accept advantages of new MBTA □buses
- ✗ Elvis spotted in Nashua Street Registry of Motor Vehicles
- ✗ Central Artery project permanently rules out Chinatown ramps

Stating the Obvious: Headlines We Knew We'd See

"Big Dig running behind schedule, at higher cost, report says"
Boston Globe, 3/19/99

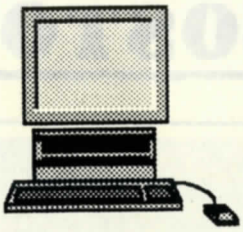
"Funding crunch in Massachusetts"
Engineering News Record, 3/22–3/29/99, on Big Dig absorbing funding from other highway projects

"Officials: MBTA may need to hike fares to meet costs"
Boston TAB, 3/16–3/22/99

"Cellucci, Menino tussle over runway"
Boston Globe, 3/24/99

"Convention Center may be hurt, as hotel plans falter"
Wall Street Journal, 3/24/99

"Critics say politics drive Turnpike project"
Boston Globe, 3/99



NEW WEB SITES TO BOOKMARK

Check out these exciting new web pages!

Mass. Highway
www.buildinnerbelt@ksullivan.org/foot_in_mouth

Massport
www.1432propaganda.org/not_Hanscom

MBTA
www.mbta.com/busesrule/60_foot_artic

Central Artery/Tunnel
www.on-timeunder-budget.org/end_is_near
www.rampDDlives.org/never_said_never

Boston Transportation Department
www.btdtickets.org/what_sign?

Boston Redevelopment Authority
www.bramasterplan.com

Subscribe to The Boston Informer!

The Boston Informer is available by mail only. Don't miss an issue—subscribe now for $20 and receive six fact- and fun-filled issues per year!

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State ___ Zip ___
Phone _____

❑ check enclosed ❑ bill me

Make check for $20 payable to The Boston Informer and mail to:

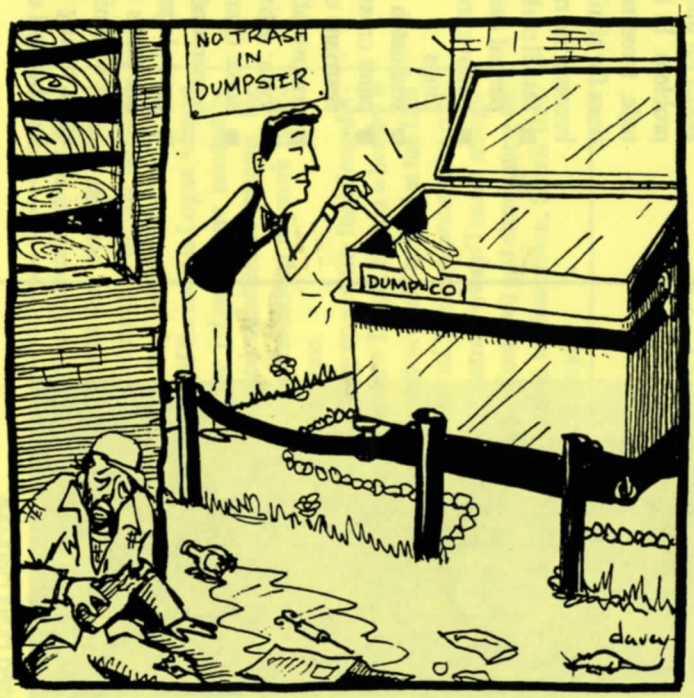
The Boston Informer
PO Box 1473
Boston, MA 02205-1473

Welcome to The Boston Misinformer,

the annual April Fool's issue of The Boston Informer, an otherwise "serious" newsletter covering development, construction and transportation downtown.

The Boston Informer is published by ATC Information, Inc., six times yearly in Boston, Massachusetts. President: Anthony Casendino; vice-presidents, Anne McKinnon, Chris Fincham.

The Boston Informer is available by mail only, $20.00 per year (cheap!). Questions? Telephone (617) 723-3584, fax (617) 437-1886 or e-mail: 103477.556@compuserve.com.



© David Bryson The Boston Informer 1999

Mayor Menino Lists Dumpster Beautification as #1 Priority

You were asking...

Q. The Boston Redevelopment Authority said the Boston Inner Harbor is the same size as Central Park. What does the BRA suggest doing so Boston can realize the potential of "our Central Park"?

A. Fill it.

Q. Mayor Menino wants to lower Boston's speed limit from 30 mph to 25 mph. When was the 30 mph limit enforced?

A. We couldn't find anyone old enough to remember.

Q. The MBTA has announced the start of "Project Clean Rat." What on earth is this?

A. All rats and other rodents found in MBTA stations with be bathed, groomed and given monthly passes to help improve the appearance of stations.

Q. With the cancellation of a recent meeting of the Panel on City Hall Plaza, have more meetings now been cancelled than were actually held?

A Probably.

Q. How is the MBTA meeting Central Artery/Tunnel commitments for Blue Line improvements, So. Boston Transitway, Red Line/Blue Line connection, North-South Rail Link, etc.?

A The MBTA is proposing 60-foot articulated buses for these transit commitments as it has for a dozen other transit projects such as Washington Street.

Q. Now that Planet Hollywood has decided not to open in the Back Bay, what is going into that site?

A Back Bay folks say that Millennium Partners has bought the building and will use it as a layover site for commuter buses, making it the most high-end bus lot ever built. Architect Richard Bertman reportedly said he is thrilled to finally be able to add bus-lot design to his extensive resume.

Subscription information and inquiries: Call 723-3584

THE BOSTON INFORMER

A publication of ATC Information, Inc.

PO Box 1473 • Boston, MA 02205-1473